

Brave by CatheWren

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Summary:

Mike was pretty sure that he was in love with El. But he hadn't dared to do anything about it. He was happy just basking in the light that was El Hopper. But now, in his senior year, Mike wanted something to change. He wanted something more. If only he could muster up the courage he needed to tell El how he felt.

If only he could be brave.

High school AU. Cute and fluffy one shot.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Happy Season 3 Anniversary!

This is for Cather Avery. Thank you for inspiring me to write.

Mike Wheeler thought that senior year would be different. After spending three years in high school, he was tired of the mundaneness of it all. If you asked him, his high school life could be summed up with three activities: studying, going to the arcade with the Party, and playing DnD. He felt that his life was lacking something. Or, more accurately, someone.

He loved his friends. The Party was really fun to hang out with. They had been friends forever and Mike was really comfortable with them. Their DnD campaigns were legendary. The weekly trips to the arcade held something irreplaceable. But, sometimes he just felt like he wanted something more.

It didn't help that Lucas had met Max in their sophomore year and hit it off. They had been dating on and off for a year and a half now. Whenever he looked at them, with all their flirty smiles and heart eyes, he felt something tight and hot form in his chest. He kept telling himself that he was happy for his friend, and not at all jealous. But then again, he was never great at lying to himself.

And then there was El, Max's best friend. She was indoctrinated into the Party shortly after Max was, when they were sophomores. El was all shy smiles and soft features. She had curly brown hair, which Mike always wanted to run his fingers through, but was too afraid to do so. Her eyes were golden brown orbs of joy, at least for Mike. Her gaze made his knees weak and his head light. And he swore that her button nose was so adorable that he would die.

El wasn't just a pretty face, though. She was extremely smart and caring too. She had a smile for everyone, and she was always polite to anyone she interacted with. Well, apart from the school bullies and the "popular" clique. Or as the Party liked to call them, the haughty,

humanoid monsters. They didn't deserve her smiles and her kindness. In Mike's completely unbiased opinion, no one deserved El's smiles. He was grateful that fortune had favoured him by allowing him to exist with El.

So yeah, Mike was in love with El, a fact that he had been questioning ever since he met her, but then became certain of it that day in junior year. Mike, Will and El shared a lunch period, and were sat under the shade of a tree, eating and laughing and chatting. Troy and James had shown up - as they often liked to do, at least up until that day - to tease the Party about their nerdy hobbies and interests.

"Look at what we have here", Troy had said. "Frogface, fairy and their mute friend."

Mike was really tired of Troy and James. He didn't understand why they were so hellbent on making their lives miserable. "What do you want, Troy?"

"We haven't seen a freakshow in quite a while. Just wanted to be entertained, Frogface." Troy said. James snickered. "Why don't you entertain us and no one gets hurt."

Mike was bristling with anger. "Why are you so obsessed with us? Can't you leave us alone?" He had stood up in his rage.

"You got something to say to me, Wheeler?" Troy snarled. And then suddenly, he came up to him and pushed Mike, hard. "When'd you grow a pair?"

Mike fell backward onto the grass. Will rushed to help him. "Are you okay?" Will asked gently, despite the situation. Mike couldn't hear him over the anger boiling his blood. He tried to get up, to face Troy. Enough was enough, Troy had bullied them long enough. All Mike could see was red. All he could imagine was how satisfying it would feel to punch that smug grin off of his bully's stupid fa-

Mike suddenly saw a fist come into his field of vision, right next to Troy's face. Before Mike could get up, the punch connected with Troy's jaw, rattling his teeth. He howled in pain.

Mike finally looked at the owner of the fist. El was standing there, with her fist curled up, ready to throw another punch. “Go away, Troy.”, she hissed. Mike had never seen El so angry. He was glad he wasn’t at the other end of her murderous glare. And yet, if it was possible, she looked even more beautiful in that moment than he remembered. A warm glow was spreading through his body.

Troy was sputtering. He held his hand up to his jaw, nursing it. “Fuck, I’m bleeding. Y-you bitch!” he spat out. Mike could see blood flowing between his teeth. Troy was staggering backwards, retreating. James, as always, went along with him. They didn’t bother them for the rest of the year.

Ever since that day, he was in awe of El. He was pretty sure that he was in love with her. But he hadn’t dared to do anything about it. He was happy just basking in the light that was El Hopper. But now, in his senior year, Mike wanted something to change. He wanted something more. If only he could muster up the courage he needed to tell El how he felt.

Mike had a powerful imagination. He had spent the summer thinking about what he could say to her. He had all these scenarios in his head, of him being charming and suave, sweeping El off of her feet. He imagined her smile blinding him, as she agreed to go on a date with him. But inevitably, Mike would come crashing down to earth, his stomach clenching with nerves and his heart heavy.

If only it was as easy as imagining what you wanted. Mike knew that he couldn’t be charming or cool. He couldn’t be anything but nervous and awkward around El. He always ended up embarrassing himself in front of her. Whether it was walking into a desk while exiting the classroom, because he was too busy admiring her, or rambling about something weird, hoping that the ground would swallow him whole. Sometimes it felt like the universe was dead set on making him look like a fool in every interaction he had with her. The soft giggles he received from her afterwards almost made him think it was worth it. Almost.

He lived for the conversations they shared before he ended up making a fool of himself. They could talk about nothing and everything and not get tired of it. Mike never got tired of hearing her

talk. Her voice was like a siren song, clear and sweet, promising him heaven if only he would believe. And when those gorgeous lips of hers formed his name, his heart fluttered madly in his chest, and he was afraid that he was going to pass out. He never did, thank God.

Senior year had started, and Mike had started feeling frustrated on top of feeling the painful longing that came with pining after El. He wanted to do something about her, very badly, but he couldn't bear thinking about what would happen if he was turned down. He considered asking the Party for help, but he was too proud and too embarrassed to bring up his love life (or lack thereof) to his friends.

He wasn't brave like El was. He didn't have it in him to take such a big risk. Because if he opened up his heart, and found out that his feelings were unrequited, he would be devastated. And that's saying nothing of the friendship that Mike and El had, which would undoubtedly be ruined.

What to do, then? Mike was at an impasse. He had been ever since he fell in love with El. But recently, he had been more and more on edge. Like he couldn't contain his affection inside him much longer. He felt like a ticking time bomb, primed to explode what felt like any day now. And when he did, he had a feeling that it could get messy.

Mike decided then, that he would ask out the girl of his dreams (literally) even if it killed him. It seemed like he was going to die anyway, either by a rejection or by a bomb, and Mike refused to go down without a fight.

"El, I'm coming for you."

He stilled.

"That sounds ominous. Uh... you get the idea."

Notes for the Chapter:

God, I can't live without Mileven fluff and angst.

Next chapter: Mike awkwardly talks to El.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

With a mischievous smile, El asked, “Are you asking me out on a date, Mike Wheeler?” Her eyebrow was raised to emphasize the question.

Mike’s heart thundered heavily in his chest and his breathing grew rapid. “Um, yes?” he answered, failing to make his statement sound unlike a question.

Mike goes to talk to El. Awkwardness ensues.

El was working at the public library that day. Hopper had offered her a job at the station, but she had politely declined and taken up a role at the library. She preferred quiet places to places with criminals in it.

Each member of the Party was busy with their own studies or job, so Mike knew that he could talk to El alone. So he set off on his bike, heading downtown. The sun was beginning to set, and the sky was awash with reds, oranges and purples. Mike thought that it was a fitting setting for his noble journey, his quest for love. He imagined inspirational music rising around him, as he got closer to the library. It crescendoed as he reached the building, and he took a moment to gather himself, looking at the horizon.

The party said that he had a tendency to be overdramatic. But Mike didn’t believe them. Not at all. They were overdramatic.

The track in his mind slowly faded out as he entered the library. There was hardly anyone there. Mike could only see a couple of employees stacking books on bookshelves and the librarian sitting at her desk. The environment was comfortingly silent and some of his nerves melted away.

“I can do this,” he thought.

Mike made his way deeper into the library, looking for the girl that had captured his heart. His stomach was tight with nervousness, and his heart had started beating faster. He didn't allow himself to rethink his decision to come here and talk to her. Knowing himself, he would probably chicken out. He had one goal in mind: find El. He decided to think about what came after that later.

As he traversed around the labyrinthine library with the bookshelves towering above him, his mind contained only one thing: El. He was incapable of thinking about anything else at that point. All he could focus on was her familiar curls, her breathtaking eyes, and her irresistible smile. The sound of her laugh, the crinkle of her eyes when she giggled, the way she tucked her hair behind her ear when she talked to him. God, she was beautiful. For all the grudges Mike held against the universe, he was eternally grateful that someone as beautiful as El was in his life. How was she so ethereally perfect? It didn't seem rea-

He had just turned one of the corners of the bookshelf maze, and his breath hitched in his throat. Because standing before him, stacking the books from her cart onto the shelves, was none other than El. The golden light of the sunset had filtered through the windows and hit her profile in just the right way. Her usually rich brown hair looked golden, and her skin shone with the radiance of a star. It struck Mike again just how beautiful she was, his recent thoughts seemingly forgotten.

She was wearing a comfy pink sweater and a pair of dark blue jeans. She looked so pretty, and Mike wished he could just stare at her forever. A smile unconsciously crept up on his face. His heart beat slowed, and skipped every now and then. Boy, was El a sight for sore eyes.

In his drunken state, it occurred to him how she reminded him of peace and serenity. Like a field full of lilies under a blanket of stars. The scent of the flowers eliciting a sense of nirvana, telling him that, in that moment, everything was perfect with his world.

Flowers! God damn, he should have brought her flowers! It was the least he could have done.

He consciously looked down at himself. He was wearing a creased, striped polo and a crumpled pair of shorts. No, the least he could have done was to dress better for this occasion. He started berating himself on how he should have probably planned this “quest” better, how he could have made it easier for her to say yes. He didn’t deserve her. No one did, least of all him! He should probably just cut his losses and get out of th-

“Mike?”

El had turned to face him, and wore an adorably confused look on her face. Her sweet voice managed to snap Mike out of his downward spiral, not before he mumbled a quick “Fuck!” under his breath.

Taking a deep breath, he waved his hand at her awkwardly. “Hey, El.”

El still seemed confused, but smiled slowly - her smiles would be the death of him, Mike swore - and said, “Hi. What are you doing here?”

‘It’s now or never’, Mike thought.

“Um.., Just came to m-meet y-you, I guess.” he stuttered out.

‘Smooth’, he thought sarcastically.

Fortunately, Mike didn’t have to linger on his pathetic attempt at speech for too long, because El’s smile brightened and she ambled towards him.

The nervousness came back in full force, and Mike started to sweat. He grimaced as he realised that this was already going downhill, and he hadn’t even started yet.

“Is everything okay?” El asked with a frown, obviously noticing his discomfort.

“Y-yeah, everything’s fine.” Mike replied. He took a deep breath. “Listen, El. I need to talk to you about something.”

El nodded and shot him a smile, urging him to go on.

“Uh.. okay, here goes. El, we’ve been friends for a long time. I’m really glad that you agreed to join our Party. It’s been a blast, these

last few years, hasn't it? Anyway, what I wanted to tell you, is that uh... Do you like food?"

As soon as the question stumbled out of his mouth, he closed his eyes, and resisted the urge to bang his head against the bookshelf next to him.

"Do I like food?" El asked.

Mike opened his eyes to see that El had an amused smirk on her face. It quickly morphed into a knowing smile as he replied.

"Yeah, you know, for dinner or something."

Mirth danced in El's eyes as she nodded her head.

"Yes, Mike. I do like food for dinner."

"That's awesome. Um, would you like to eat dinner with me?" Mike grimaced at his question.

'Well, I'm in too deep to bail now.', he thought.

El seemed to think for a bit before replying. "Sure, Mike. I'd love to." She smiled at him demurely, and with the relief that flooded him upon hearing her answer, he almost fainted.

A goofy grin emerged on his face, without permission from his brain. But then he caught up with the conversation, and realized that he hadn't really specified that he was asking her out on a date. She beat him to the punch.

With a mischievous smile, she asked, "Are you asking me out on a date, Mike Wheeler?" Her eyebrow was raised to emphasize the question.

Mike's heart thundered heavily in his chest and his breathing grew rapid. "Um, yes?" he answered, failing to make his statement sound unlike a question.

Mortified, Mike quickly tried to amend himself. "I mean, yes. Yes, I'm asking you out. I like you. Like so much. And I thought that you might want to go out on a date with me. I know that I should have brought flowers or something, and dressed better for the occasion, but I was in my head this whole summer, and just today I decided to

ask you. It's completely fine if you don't want it to be a date. I mean that would suck for me. Like majorly, but you know, it's totally tubu-

El had pulled down Mike and attacked his chapped lips with her own, into a mind-numbing kiss that shut down his ramble. Only God knows how much more he would have spewed out without thinking if she hadn't stopped him.

But at that moment, Mike wasn't thinking about his ramble. His mind was completely blank. It was like someone had pulled the plug on his brain. The library around them dissolved into nothingness. Fireworks exploded inside Mike's head, and goosebumps appeared everywhere in waves, travelling down his body, the source at his lips. He finally regained control over enough brain cells to reciprocate the kiss. He cautiously placed a hand at her waist, and ran the other through her hair. El's lips were soft and lush, and he was convinced that he had died and gone to heaven.

Slowly, they broke apart, with a whine escaping Mike's mouth. They rested their foreheads together and spoke in whispers.

"Finally", El murmured. "I've wanted to do that for a long time."

Mike was dumbfounded at first, and he could guess what his face looked like, because El started giggling quietly. But then, a genuine smile broke out on his face. "Sorry for taking so long. I didn't know you would say yes." he reasoned.

El looked at him sweetly. "Mike, you really are oblivious. I've been dropping hints and flirting with you for over a year now!" El exclaimed.

Shellshocked, Mike's mouth gaped open. He slowly closed it and brushed their lips together again. "Sorry", he whispered.

El hummed into his lips. She broke apart and said, "It's okay. Better late than never, right?" She smiled adoringly up at him.

As he gazed down at her, Mike's heart had never been fuller. He felt like it would expand and beat out of his chest and explode in a

bloody mess. He decided that there was no better moment in time than then. Tucking her hair on her face behind her ear, Mike whispered, "I love you, El."

El smiled brightly, and whispered in the same hushed tone, "I know, Mike. I love you too."

El leaned in once again, and as they met in the middle of the library, in the science fiction aisle, the world around them disappeared. Time ceased to exist. There was nothing but Mike and El, El and Mike. Nothing but their whispered declarations of love, and the promises that were held in them.

'Sometimes the universe rewards you, if only you are brave enough.' Mike thought with a smile.

Notes for the Chapter:

Awkward!Mike is so fun to write.

This is my first fanfic, and critique and criticism is appreciated.

Thanks for reading!

PS: Can you tell that I've never kissed anyone before?